

PLAYGROUND

Untermeyer, Louis, 1885-1977

Sliding its sinuous strength between stone clouds
A length of sunlight glides into the street
And spreads itself in coils.
A corner boils with brilliance.
Shop windows and a crowd of children raise
Their loud hosannahs like a victory
Of blazing banners.
Chimneys and cockney sparrows urge themselves
Higher upon the fiery banks of air.
Sky-scrapers shake their flanks of beaten gold.
Even this old, moth-eaten tree
Kicks free the yellow papers at his feet
And tries to toss his thanks across the skies.

Swiftly the sunlight crawls along the tall
Forbidding spires with their lifted menace.
It pours itself, a dancing benison,
Upon the altar, through the chancel-doors,
Falters into dark niches, secret halls . . .
Then leaps upon the high walls of the church
And lurches to the playground.

A spatter of garish color lights a group
Of parish girls that troop across the square.
Crude sunsets flare and scatter as they enter.
Then, in the very center, the sun drops;
Black stops it—hard, unyielding black . . .
Abashed, it creeps back in the rioting yard
Before two quiet nuns turning a rope
For little legs that burn and wave across it.
One of the nuns is young but no less grave
Than her wise, rigid sister, and she twirls
The living rope with lifeless eyes
And frigid regularity . . .
While bouncing girls, swung in a deepening rhythm,
Pause—leap—and pause—with sweeping ecstasy;
Leap---pause—and leap—in holy radiance.